

# artslink

free to all DST members

michaelmas 2006

Tomasz Dunn



Grey College

## Edinburgh Fringe 2006

Durham gets represented  
at the biggest theatre  
festival in the world

previews reviews features

# MICHAELMAS TERM PRODUCTIONS

## October

Durham Revue: Old Habits  
Die Hard  
9th-10th October  
Assembly Rooms

WitTank: Pop goes the  
iCulture  
16th-17th October  
Assembly Rooms

The Caretaker  
26th-28th October  
Assembly Rooms

## November

This is Our Youth  
2th-4th November  
Assembly Rooms

Pirates of Penzance  
8th-11th November  
Assembly Rooms

Madness of George III  
15th-18th November  
Castle Great Hall

## Freshers' Play

Yerma  
16th-18th November  
Assembly Rooms

The Rivals  
16th-18th November  
Leech Hall

Hysteria  
23th-25th November  
Assembly Rooms

A Company of Wayward  
Saints  
29th November-2nd  
December  
Assembly Rooms

## December

...thespacebetween...  
6th-9th December  
Assembly Rooms

## Artslink Editor

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James Elliott

Greetings all, and welcome to the first edition of the brand new Artslink. It's not only the look that's changed: the student-written reviews of Durham's shows are still here, but they're accompanied by previews of some of the Michaelmas term's upcoming productions and a feature on the Edinburgh Fringe. Artslink will shift focus, from simply providing a look back on a term gone by, to covering student theatre in Durham past, present and future. Previews of some of the term's biggest productions will fall alongside more general articles and opinions from you, the DST members. And with productions from all manner of theatre companies all over Durham, this term is shaping up to be a great way to start the year. Good luck to everyone performing, and to everyone else, I hope you have a tremendous term of theatre. James.

Cover image by Oliver King  
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# YOUR 2006/2007 DST EXEC



Mark Quartley

## DST President 06/07

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DST has never been in better health. This summer, seven shows from Durham took the Edinburgh Fringe by storm. Then in October, almost 300 first years joined the society (with numbers increasing daily), and the first two shows of term have played to sell-out audiences. It's great to see so many innovative pieces of theatre in this term's listings; a full-length original play, commedia dell'arte, and perhaps the most ambitious Freshers' Play for years. Of course, if you think it's all a load of rubbish, do something about it: start your own theatre company, book a space for a week, and show some people what theatre can do. I guarantee any involvement in DST is unforgettable, un-regrettable, and a lot of fun too. Mark.

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exec





Mark Quartley's intention in adapting Macbeth is pretty clear: to steer away from the traditional and avoid the unimaginative staging of Shakespeare which he believes is stifling the theatre. The Norman Chapel in the castle was an inspired choice of venue: with an audience of only about fifty people, everyone hemmed in close, it was impossible not to feel part of the action. The task fell to Quartley, Jonny Scott and Naomi Cranstoun to carry all the characters between them, and they succeeded admirably. Whilst it cannot be described as an unqualified success, the acting was flawless and the adaptation brave: it was inevitable that such a radical departure from tradition wouldn't be universally popular and I doubt this was the intention.

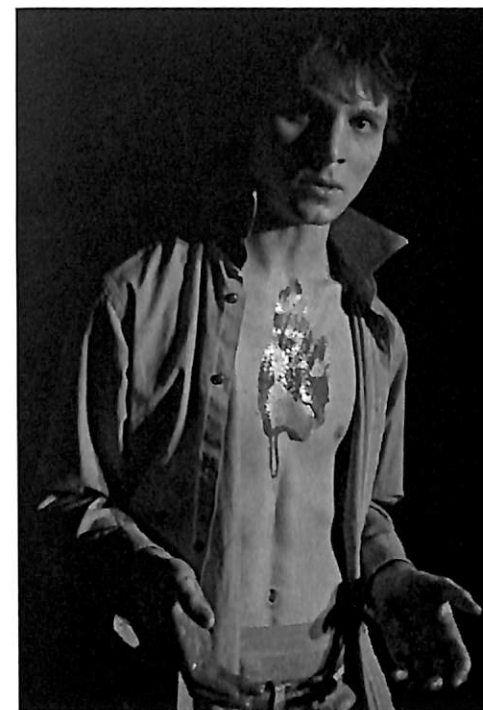
Before the play started the cast entered as themselves to a soundtrack of drum and bass, chatting to the audience before an abrupt start to the performance saw Quartley suddenly turn-

ing round covered in blood. As Macbeth, he stood up to 90 minutes of intense scrutiny, depicting his descent into murderous thug and letting our sympathy ebb away before the fantastically choreographed final fight, and his violent death at Macduff's hands. His relationship with Lady Macbeth sizzled with sexual energy whilst maintaining the underlying manipulation and mind games. Cranstoun did an excellent job in juggling her roles, notably as the witches and Lady Macbeth. To overcome the obvious problems in having one actor for three witches, the other two hags were represented with hand puppets, which fitted in well with Cranstoun's childish and insane voice, an interesting interpretation of the women on the heath. Impressively she managed to swap instantly into the headstrong Lady Macbeth, a highlight being her maniacal sleepwalking in which she seemed close to ripping her supposedly bespotted hand off.

Meanwhile Jonny Scott, as Duncan, Banquo and Macduff, was equally excellent - his depiction of Macduff's agony on learning about the slaughter of his "pretty chickens and their dam" was among the most affecting and moving moments I have seen in Durham theatre, his fear and shock on discovering Duncan's body chilling. The only flaw was the clarity of the delineation between the characters. It has to be said that it was sometimes difficult to keep up with what was going on, in particular with Cranstoun swapping between male and female roles, although the use of subtle differences in costumes often helped in this respect.

It is probably unfair to point out the difficulties in trying to put on a play in a thousand-year old chapel. With no viable way of leaving and entering the stage, mainly because it was no more than a space between the benches, actors not on stage stood facing the wall, which was distracting at times. It could also be argued that the audience should get used to new ways of doing things and not just the usual off-stage costume changes. Again, the advantages of this stunning building far outweighed the disadvantages. It was used to best effect when the whole room was plunged into disconcerting pitch blackness, most creepily as Cranstoun's witches chanted and cried in the darkness.

So the one unsuccessful aspect of the play was that troubling prefix



"young". Quartley is right that Macbeth contains themes that are relevant to teenage lives; the only problem is that the characters themselves cannot be morphed into twenty-year-olds while keeping the same storyline. Before long I had forgotten that this was supposed to be *Young Macbeth*, but this is probably a good thing: as a modern interpretation of Shakespeare, this is one of the most intriguing and adventurous I have seen.

Young Macbeth was performed on the 2nd-6th June in the Norman Chapel, in Durham Castle, by Offensive Shadows Theatre Company  
Reviewed by Zakl Moosa.  
Photography by Gabriel Heley.



Anarchy, defenestration and a subversive satire of the machinery and corruption of the state, it sounded too good to be true for an end of term wind down at the Assembly Rooms. Phil Sidney's production of Dario Fo's classic *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* was anything but a gentle wind down towards a summer of mental torpor and unashamed laziness. A small matey cast worked extremely well together to create one of the most intense and energy filled performances I have ever witnessed in Durham student theatre. I left the theatre feeling a little dazed and that a little lie down and perhaps a cup of cocoa would be in order to calm my jangling nerves.

*Accidental Death of an*

*Anarchist* is a clever play, when I left the theatre I could see this but I wasn't entirely sure what the whole thing was about. This was the major dilemma with Phil Sidney's production: he packed it with so much energy, so many pleasing slapstick moments, fast-paced political rants and clever repartee that it was difficult to fully engage with the political and satirical purpose of Fo's script.

*Accidental Death* uses as a springboard the real life tragic events surrounding the arrest of anarchist railway man Giuseppe Pinelli in 1969. He was accused of carrying out a bombing in Milan that killed 17 and injured 100 people. After four days of interrogation in police headquarters Pinelli 'fell' out of a fourth floor window and died. Police claimed that the death was an 'accident'. The play explores the aftermath of these events in which a character ambiguously called 'The Maniac' is questioned by the increasing confused and neurotic members of the Italian police force.

James Elliott played the Maniac with his customary well-observed intensity. This was another very impressive and high-octane performance which drove the plot forward in a frenzied style. A difficult role to pull off, James largely managed to convey Fo's political satire whilst maintaining the pace of the production. However in the second half the Maniac lapses into long streams of political polemic, the full weight of what was

being said was somewhat lost in James's frenzied performance and occasional lapses in diction. In addition the director's decision to include moments of modern day political criticism against such fashionable subjects as the Labour government and the war in Iraq was a bad one. It came across as being pretentious and lacking in any sort of subtlety or real purpose to the plot; this was particularly clear when compared with Fo's own complex and intricate script.

James was ably supported by a talented cast of including the seemingly ever-present DST stalwarts Oliver King, Adam Blampied, Caroline James and Erica Buist. Ollie and Adam both gave fine individual performances that stood out for the ability to create a larger than life caricature and maintain it successfully in a manner that was engaging, funny and not overblown. The



best moments of the play occurred when 5 or 6 members of the cast shared the stage, the dominant characters of James, Ollie and Adam were well supported by Gethin Alderman and Caroline James who worked together as two of the police underlings confused and run ragged by the existential machinations of the Maniac. Director Phil Sidney must be congratulated in managing to get his cast to work together and maintain an exciting level of activity constantly surrounding the central characters.

With such a sophisticated script that probes the issues of fascism, totalitarianism and the threats of a police state transcending the particulars of the events which inspired it, the success of such a production must be measured in both its quality as a piece of satire and as a theatrical spectacle. As a piece of action packed and exciting theatre this was an excellent performance, however I couldn't help thinking that this did not do complete justice to Fo's satirical masterpiece. The production perhaps suffered a little through its short end of term rehearsal period not allowing the cast to fully appreciate the weight of what they were saying and combining this knowledge with what were otherwise excellent and energetic performances.

*Accidental Death of an Anarchist* was performed on the 21st-22nd June in the Assembly Rooms, by Burning Man Productions. Reviewed by Magnus Taylor. Photography by Oliver King.





"All the world's a stage," utters the melancholy Jaques in the most famous speech of *As You Like It*. And what a stage was the Fellows Garden for Castle Theatre Company's annual Summer Shakespeare. The walled garden formed an intimate pastoral background for the action of Shakespeare's lively comedy, allowing the audience to feel very much involved in the complex web of romance weaved within the Forest of Arden.

The action of the play focuses on two opposing settings, the city court of usurped Duke Frederick (Mat Munro) and the rural idyll of the forest, where his banished brother dwells in exile. The Duke's niece and heroine of the play, Rosalind (Carrie Fewins) falls in love with Orlando (Jonny Scott), but is shortly expelled from court through her uncle's jealousy; accompanied by close cousin Celia (Eleanor Quinn) and the fool Touchstone (Roddy Peters), she makes her way to the forest, disguised as a boy. Coincidence reunites the two

lovers, and the wily Rosalind uses her disguise to test Orlando's devotion. Love, disguise and mistaken identities all combine to create a wonderful comic effect.

However, although commonly hailed Shakespeare's most light-hearted comedy, *As You Like It* has more serious undercurrents and director Louisa Fitzgerald played on these ingeniously. Fitzgerald highlights the opposition between the oppressive court and the freedom of the forest, and explores gender transgression and feminist undertones, yet never losing sight of the play's surface humour. Fitzgerald drew on the play's universality to bring it up to date through costume and use of props, making the play as relevant today as it was 400 years ago. The contrast between Arden and the court was especially effective, as the play shifted seamlessly between the two settings. In Arden, the characters were clad in wax jackets, peaked caps or hippy attire, and languished beneath trees, lazily sipping beer. The whole scene took on an air of liberation and ease. Conversely, the courtiers were dressed in stiff dark suits and occupied an imposing position, marching briskly and purposefully on and off-stage.

The wide array of characters who occupied these two diverging realities were fully realised and some impressively real. Carrie Fewins' Rosalind was superbly portrayed as a strong and intelligent woman, seizing

control of her fate and vividly alive on stage, constantly in motion in her testing of Orlando and in her attempts to direct the misguided peasants in matters of love. However, Fewins also successfully conveyed her more vulnerable and emotional side in her laments of love for Orlando. Orlando is a character somewhat in Rosalind's shadow in terms of wit and intelligence, but Jonny Scott effectively captured his passionate and generous spirit, and his relationships with Adam and Rosalind were touchingly conveyed. Although less realistic figures, the comically emotional Cecilia and fool Touchstone were splen-

didly acted and added much to the play's humour. Touchstone in his canary yellow suit, contentedly blowing bubbles acted as an interesting counterpart to malcontent Jaques with his gloomy philosophical outlook on life. His wry commentary on the actions of the play were superbly delivered by Aidan Briggs, who conveyed timeworn speeches with a fresh twist.

As well as the leading roles, a special mention should also go to the shepherds and country folk. Corin (Alex Tofts) and Silvius (Hugh de la Bedoyere), with their strong West Country accents and peaked caps were an entertaining comic duo, encapsulating the rustic simplicity of pastoral life.

Comedy was provided in many forms, from physical and slapstick comedy to more thoughtful musings and suggestive punning. However, the comedy took a while to warm up and the play was at its most humorous in the second act, as characters grew in their roles and the pace picked up.

The play closes on a high note of joyous resolution, conveyed impeccably through song and dance, with beautiful musical accompaniment. A truly delectable production, imaginatively directed and exquisitely delivered.



**As You Like It** was performed on the 14th-17th June in Fellows Garden, in Durham Castle, by Castle Theatre Company.  
Reviewed by Emily Cragg.  
Photography by Gabriel Heley.

as you like it

as you like it



Reviewing the Revue is tough work, almost as tough as creating a snappy opening sentence, which I hate doing because I can never think of a good one; opening sentences traditionally being either powerful, humorous, bizarre or just downright arty-farty, all of which are eluding me in a sprawling spiral of sporadic nonsense which may already be setting a record for the worst and longest opening sentence in the history of this magazine, one which may have already forced you to close this magazine and throw yourself, screaming, into a great big fridge. But why is this review causing me so much bother? Mostly because I just don't have firm positive or negative attitude toward the Revue's latest show, *God All My Tea*

*My Tea*. The Revue have had a fair bit of stick over the past year, but as I left the Assembly Rooms at the end of last year, I wasn't feeling offended or overjoyed by their latest offering, just a bit, well the only word for is, 'meh'.

But my indifference shouldn't really be seen as a bad thing. The Revue knocked out some real belters with this show, highlights including Ed Gamble's racist monologue on tribespeople ("like Coco Pops, but bigger"), Pete Riley (just generally), and a short snippet involving Tom Neenan, an empty pushchair, a lot of what looked like jam and the line "Have you ever immediately regretted doing something?" However, the Revue never managed to ride the highs from a good

sketch over into another, the rush from the audience ultimately fading as a mediocre sketch inevitably followed a big laugh. This left the audience generally laughing in intervals and just sitting there, waiting for the next big laugh to come: the show gave the audience a fractured experience, leaving me, personally, just a bit cold when the final bow was taken. Even the songs, something the Revue is famous for, were amusing in places but didn't stand out, which they really should have done, considering they acted as the show's bookends.

The show was preceded by a short set from Nick Mohammed, which itself could be seen as a summation of the Revue's show to follow: superb moments, such as the achingly funny miming sketches, almost smothered by rambling monologues which, though amusing in places, were very long and slowed the pace of the set down, again allowing the audience's high to fade.

This is where the relevance of my opening sentence can be used. It's tough to look back on *God All My Tea* and think of something decisive to say: I just end up flipping from thought to thought, of good sketch to mediocre one, never forming a general, solid viewpoint, because that was the nature of the show itself. This leaves a show that was very enjoyable in parts but remains to be a hotch-potch of laughs and long pauses as nothing funny seemed to happen in between sketches which were laugh-out-loud brilliant. An

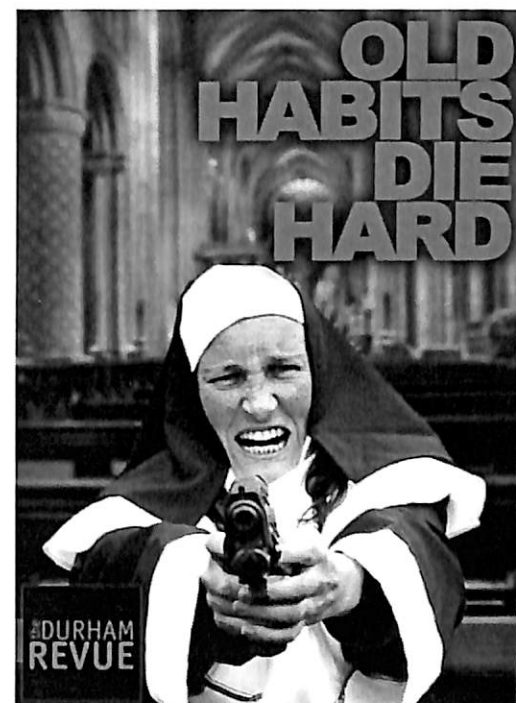
amusing but non-cohesive show then, which I thought was not a bad way at all to spend an evening, and, as I can't think of snappy and all-encompassing closing sentence either, I'll just stop.

*God All My Tea* was performed on the 9th-10th October in the Assembly Rooms, by the Durham Revue.

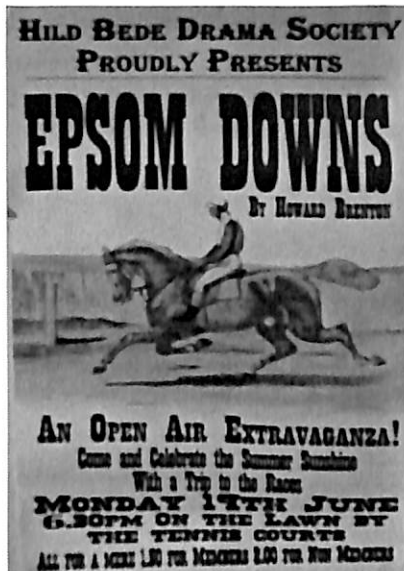
Reviewed by Adam Blampled.

Photography by the Durham Revue.

**Having performed *God All My Tea!* this summer, the Durham Revue went on to perform *Old Habits Die Hard* at the Edinburgh Fringe 2006**







I turned up to Hild Bede's lawn not sure what to expect, which probably happens a lot in Durham: what was strange was that this time it applied to the cast as well as the audience.

Maybe some people would dispute whether this production of *Epsom Downs* was really a 'proper play', but to me that isn't the point: this was simply a very entertaining short piece of theatre, serving its purpose admirably. The audience was told before it began that it had been put together in about 24 hours, and though it's fair to say this was apparent in the performance, it didn't seem to do so negatively. Instead, what we got was a cast who looked as though they were enjoying themselves as much as the audience: yes, it was silly and madcap and a bit difficult to follow sometimes, but it was fun and I enjoyed myself, so again,

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these criticisms really aren't all that negative.

In terms of the performances, Erica Buist was well-cast as the male/female Lord Rack, what with her ability to act drunk convincingly and get laughs both where they were obvious and where they weren't. Another highlight of the cast was Adam Blampied, who portrayed several characters, one of which was the Darby, commenting on the completely bizarre horserace, and another was a Granddad: Blampied played them all with sufficient distinction, and though they may have been caricatures, that was what was called for in this production. Not everyone was as convincing though: Ben Wille looked a little out of his depth, not able to think on his feet as well as the others. However, his did not detract from the other performances on show.

Overall, in between the better performances and the sheer randomness of the piece (such as the race, where suddenly people became jockeys, horses or even the track itself) made *Epsom Downs* a very enjoyable and entertaining show, and more than that, a definite success.

*Epsom Downs* was performed on the 19th June on the Hild Bede Lawn by Hild Bede Drama Society.

Reviewed by Eve Hardbattle.

Having received healthy praise from the press in Edinburgh, WitTank arrived back in Durham with *Pop Goes the iCulture*. There was some old material, some new material, but most importantly there was a lot of very good material within their conventionally quick-fire hour, getting numerous rounds of applause and a truly warm response.

The show opened with the brilliant *West Side Story* parody involving the bitter clash between "Help the Aged" and "Save the Children", a really good way of starting the show as it's certainly one of their better sketches. This was then followed by a short succession of faster scenes, and generally the pacing was well-measured, never letting the laughs die down too much but also allowing some rest between punchlines.

I was pleased to see that the group has become better at hitting their punchlines and moving on than they had been when they were newer to the fray. Also, the retained sketches were well-chosen, such as Rob Leworthy's finding Jesus having been trapped in a laundry bin, and the linking of several previous sketches (involving a Citroen C4 parody, a scarecrow wannabe and a poked lion) into a hilarious Wizard of Oz tribute.

Naz Osmanoglu made the best impression on the audience: his ridiculous emphasis on certain words and his ability for accents helped the group hugely. Jez Scharf performed a difficult



solo scene involving making a terrible impression on an audience member very well, and Mark Cooper-Jones carried the burden of the "World's Most Boring Man" sketch tremendously. Kieran Boyd and Rob Leworthy were both funny, but they weren't as featured as other members. Jenni Armstrong made the weakest connection with the audience, due to her slightly poor comic timing. Her "Suicide Note" scene was one of the longest of the show and needed regular punctuations of laughter to work, but she just didn't get there.

Overall, it's very heartening to see WitTank maturing so quickly. They put on a fast-paced and very entertaining show which left me delighted to have spent the hour watching them. What will be interesting will be seeing whether they can keep this up to us in the Revue. Whatever the result, so long as WitTank continue to produce comedy as good as they did this time, they're surely much success in their future.

*Pop Goes the iCulture* was performed on the 16th-18th October in the Assembly Rooms, by WitTank.

Reviewed by John Harvey.

Photography by Adam Eaton.

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During August this year no fewer than seven productions braved the commute from the Durham stage up to the hype, competition and adventure of the Edinburgh Festival - ranging from the hilarity of the Durham Revue and WitTank to the draining grit in *Young Macbeth* and *Pains of Youth*, we proved to the world of amateur and professional theatre that DST has a lot to offer! Becoming one of thousands of events going on in Edinburgh during those three weeks may sound glamorous (as well as the main International Festival, there's also the Fringe, the Book Festival, the Film Festival, the Media Festival, even a Food Festival, and more); in fact there is a lot of hard graft involved, though the infectious buzz more than makes up for it!! There is an absolute plethora of shows to see, with varying styles and, honestly, varying quality...I was frankly pretty disgusted by *Star Trip*, a crazy stupid mime act set in space, but moved to tears by *Knots*, a beautiful contemporary dance perform-

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ance exploring the theme of marriage.

Edinburgh is a wonderful place to visit, whatever time of year. Once you're used to the intermittent rain and Scottish temperatures, it has an amazing contrast between the expanse of Princes Street in the New Town, not unlike the grandeur and overwhelming scale of London's Oxford Street, and the cobbled web of lanes and alleyways which make up the Old Town, with the Royal Mile at the centre - which is the ultimate destination of all festival-goers. The crowds there are crazy, with the constant battle between the flyers and the flyered heard in a sound-collage of cries, like market traders selling their shows! Interspersed down the Mile are makeshift stages where companies perform extracts from their productions, not to mention the street performers scattered through the crowds - statue artists, caricaturists, acrobats, musicians, and fire-eaters. And unbelievably this festival atmosphere doesn't falter for the entire three

weeks!

Undoubtedly the best way to experience Edinburgh is to take a production up there - you're inherently part of it all but you can make time to see some theatre too. Get a good venue, don't make your run too long, and make sure your show is sellable...then when you get there work hard at publicity but don't let your director make you flyer all day! Alternatively you could opt to get a job there for August, but beware: working the festival takes about five weeks of your summer, since you're inevitably dragged into the mammoth task of transforming an unassuming building into the venue it will masquerade as for the three weeks of the festival, and then of course you have to return it to its previous lacklustre state at the end of the month. The get-in and get-out are hard work - many bonds between co-workers are formed through grumbling in chorus - but the venues do look fantastic for the public.



There are loads of different jobs to apply for (box office, press, reception, front of house, bar work, flyering, technical, or backstage) and if you can swing it you can fit in lots of theatre too, especially as you can often get in free with your venue pass. And of course, if you can get a bed in a hostel, you can easily just visit Edinburgh purely as a spectator, whether to support friends or not...try to read reviews ahead of time and listen to other people's recommendations so as to see the best productions.

The festival is a fantastic experience - a window into the gritty world of show business, but also a great way to meet like-minded people, make contacts for future career opportunities, and widen your experience of different styles and standards of performance. The DST representatives did us proud this year - let's hope to see as many shows, workers, and visitors up there again next summer!

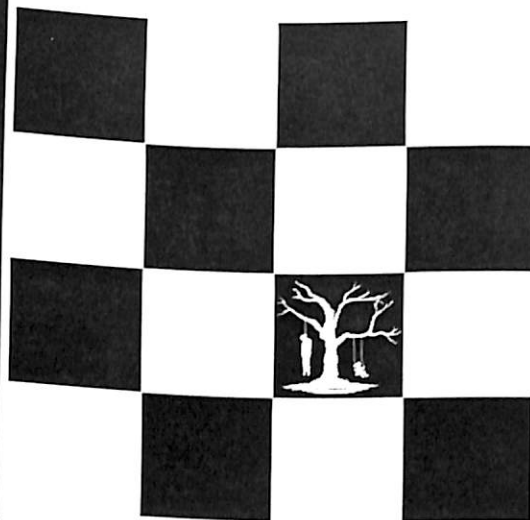
The Edinburgh Fringe took place between the 6th and 28th August 2006.

Reviewed by Zoë Andrews.

Photography by Oliver King and Gabriel Heley.

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This is the last show in Durham this term. This is the first student-written, full-length show to be performed at the Assembly Rooms. This is devised by two students and without a director.

The play focuses on two characters, "Boy" and "Girl", who are trapped in an isolated space which they believe to be outside space and time. With no idea of how they got there or anything but fragmented memories of "out there", they try to understand their situation and cope with the often cruel demands of the space.

One question that is repeatedly and forcefully answered by the Boy is why they have been thrown together; the situation they are in is an isolated experience, and they are "the same person". The essence (or soul, or whatever makes you 'you') of a person has been split and they are each a broken piece. Having lived their lives incomplete, the missing piece of the other, they now

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encounter one another for the first time but still cannot complete themselves.

The prevailing theme is death; how one might deal with their own, how one might imagine it to be, and the lengths one might go to so as to prolong its denial. Death is, oddly enough, a main influence of the play as I've done an unnatural amount of reading on the subject, and since all my plays thus far have addressed death in some way, a fairly unnatural amount of writing as well.

Sarah Kane is also an influence; I've always found humour in the tragic, and *thespacebetween* focuses on poetry in the brutal. The brutality in *thespacebetween* is a force not controlled by any of the characters rather than the cruelty of another person, until a point expressing the ultimate assertion of control. The theme of love continues throughout the play, though it is a type of love with which very few are familiar or comfortable. When love is simply "tessellation" it can be argued one can love something simply because they should not be without it.

Another influence is Samuel Beckett; the destructive co-dependency of the characters and the meaninglessness of life (and indeed death) also feed into the whole existentialist view of the play. Whether or not the fact of disappearance and meaninglessness of death is "gloomy" is largely up to the individual, but I hope people agree that it being something to fear does not render it depressing or an evil in itself.

The play also deals with the nature of reality and whether we can trust what appears to us. The Boy, in his paranoid and fractured state, believes all colours to be deceptive and forbids the presence of any colour whatsoever. The black and white checkerboard theme is apparent in the setting and takes a warped turn into their rule-fuelled routine of foiling the deception. There's to be a tendency in contemporary theatre to ignore the audience, barely acknowledging their presence; as with all "...with fire! Productions" performances, the audience is seen as an integral part of theatre rather than simply an observer of it. In *thespacebetween*, the audience is incorporated from the very start (whether they are

aware of it or not). In everything I have written there has been at least a moment where an actor peeks through the invisible curtain between stage and audience just to say "I can see you"; by acknowledging the medium through which you're expressing what you want to say, you draw attention to it as a device you're using to make a point.

End this term with your first chance to see student-written theatre this year, and your only chance to see it outside of the DDF. Being performed from Wednesday 6th to Saturday 9th of December, *thespacebetween* is an intense experience not to be missed.

...thespacebetween... will be performed on the 6th-9th December in the Assembly Rooms, by ...with fire! Productions. Previewed by Erica Buist. Graphics by James Elliott.

## FRESHERS' PLAY 2006

# MYERMA

BY FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

Assembly Rooms Theatre

16 - 18 November 2006

7.30 PM



michaelmas term 2006

Traditionally, the Freshers' Play is a highly-stressful, intense and worrying time for everyone involved, from cameo part to director. And having met this year's director of Federico Lorca's *Yerma*, Lara Magor, this doesn't seem to have changed very much.

"My cast sometimes forgets I'm at every rehearsal," she tells me, explaining that the job is every bit as demanding as it always has been. But it's by no means all doom and gloom, not at all: her cast are very enthusiastic and responsive, and even help her with blocking in rehearsal. "I definitely wanted this to be a group effort," she says, seemingly looking for a particular bond between director and cast. One that involves them all going to salsa lessons on Tuesdays.

"I wanted them to move more fluently," she explains, it clearly having nothing to do with embarrassing all of them in front of one another. Still, it's a very interesting idea, and part of a more general effort to keep the experience as enjoyable as possible whilst encouraging a necessary freedom of movement onstage.

Even in the auditions, Lara expected much from the actors who wanted parts. "It was incredibly hard to choose our *Yerma*," referring to Georgina Cox, who eventually was cast as the eponymous role. "We pushed them and pushed them, and we were amazed by Georgina." Lorca's play focuses on this character, whose obsession about having a child pushes her

through the events of the play, and this is part of the reason Lara chose this play to direct.

"It's passionate, it's all about passion," she says, also noting similarities to ancient Greek tragedy. "Though in Greek tragedy it's more about a collective general tragedy, whereas in Lorca's play it's all about *Yerma*." Not that the rest of the cast aren't hugely important to the play. "Without a strong supporting cast, the whole play would be dragged down," so evidently *Yerma* won't purely be about, well, *Yerma*.

One of the biggest challenges they all face is getting the right balance between creating a believable and realistic play, and properly utilising the grand and vivid imagery of Lorca's writing. Pushing the point about him being "very gay," Lara explains that *Yerma* being set in the 1930s, when Lorca himself lived, meant certain factors had to be included and portrayed in the production.

"One of the challenges is showing that women simply didn't have freedom or choices in 1930s Catholic Spain," something that will fall on all of the cast to get across. Lorca's sexuality was a factor in much of his writing, partially expressed in *Yerma* by her not being able to have the child she so yearns to have, mirroring Lorca's frustration in not being allowed to live comfortably with his sexuality. This is reflected very closely in Lara's ruling idea for this production, "to explore the

power and tragedy of human obsession in a repressed society." It follows that one of the biggest challenges for Georgina will be to portray this maternal obsession, but Lara noted that there have been challenges to overcome here. "Georgina isn't really that maternal, but does have this obsession with apples that we're making use of." Apples? "She really likes apples."

Apples and pregnancy aside, one of the most significant aspects Lara wants to include in *Yerma* is something she called '*duende*'. *Duende* is, apparently, "All that has dark sounds has *duende*... *duende* is not in the throat, it surges up from the soles in the feet... not a matter of technique, but blood... it is the very spirit of the earth that everyone feels, but no philosopher can explain" (according to Lorca himself). Getting this across is going to be a massive challenge, but one Lara feels she and her cast and crew are up to. Given the importance Lorca gave *duende* in relation to his plays, a lot of the success of the play will be down to how well this is put across to the audience.

So what would constitute a success for the director? "I hadn't even thought about that," she says, taken aback. "If it goes all right on the night, if people appreciate it, I suppose." With only three and a half weeks left before opening night at the time of interview, she's "so busy trying to organise rehearsals that it's difficult to see further than next week," but goes on to

say how this is the time when she feels she can ask everything of her cast, to devote themselves entirely to it to make it the success she wants. And is she concerned about the pressure of being the director of this now annual institution? "Oh yes."

But as with all theatre, the stress and nerves will probably help push Lara and her cast and crew to produce a truly memorable piece of theatre. And if that does hold true, then with the President describing this as "perhaps the most ambitious Freshers' Play for years," along with all the other troubles and traumas, then we should be in for three nights of bloody good theatre.



*Yerma* will be performed on the 16th-18th November in the Assembly Rooms, by Durham Student Theatre.  
Interview by James Elliott.





Commedia dell'arte is the art of improvised comedy which dates back to 16th century Venetian society and is traditionally performed in masks. It mocks hierarchical society and each stock character represents and parodies social stereotypes, from the learned doctor who knows everything and nothing, to the worldly tart who flirts incessantly with the audience. The army, the law and the clergy are all ridiculed. Obligatory sacrilege and ritual profanation prevail as love becomes promiscuity; the very notion of order disappears. Its influences on today's society are profound, from Punch and Judy and the Circus to Blackadder, which mocks hierarchical society in a very comedic fashion.

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*A Company of Wayward Saints* is scripted commedia, complete with its own Flasheart and Baldrick-style figures. It follows a troupe of amateur dramatists who attempt to put on "The History of Man" in a last ditch attempt to buy their way back home by gaining the patronage of a wealthy Duke. But to a group of actors far too selfish, self-important and self-indulgent to work together this proves to be a challenge they may never overcome. In the first act they parody various historical events, such as the assassination of Caesar, before falling out, falling apart, and coming back together to focus on the more insightful aspects of human life in "The History of A Man".

Commedia dell'arte is physical theatre at its most grotesque, bodies contorting to exaggerations beyond naturalistic theatrical convention. The comedy is irreverent, crude and often slapstick, mirroring commedia's exaggerated nature. This play's deft mixture of physicality and humour should provide any audience member with a fast-paced and richly enjoyable theatrical experience, rarely afforded them.

*A Company of Wayward Saints* will be performed at the Assembly Rooms theatre from Wednesday 29th November-Saturday 2nd December at 7.30pm. With an extremely strong cast of seasoned Durham performers this promises to be a great performance. *A Company of Wayward Saints* will be performed on the 29th November-2nd December in the Assembly Rooms, by Another Country Productions.

Previewed by Alice Himsworth and Oliver King.

# artslink mailing list

**want to contribute to artslink?**

**want to be kept informed of all the shows that need reviews?**

**or do you simply want your inbox to be free of artslink emails?**

From next term, Artslink will be operating a new mailing list. DST members signed up to this list will receive the emails from the Artslink editor about shows that need reviewing, so members who do not wish to contribute to the magazine will not receive unnecessary emails.

To sign up to the Artslink mailing list, simply email the Artslink editor (james.elliott@durham.ac.uk) who will then add you to the list.

**Thank you to everyone who contributes to Artslink,**  
James Elliott,  
Artslink Editor

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mailing list



The Madness of George III

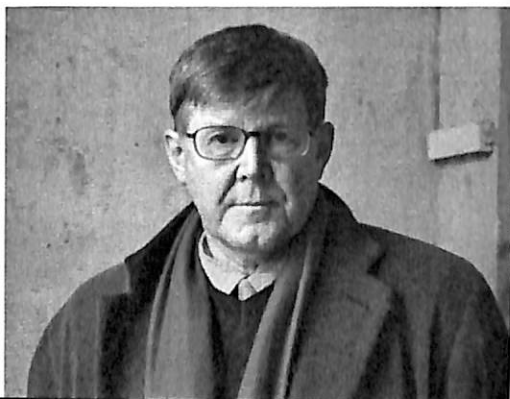
From 15th to the 18th of November Castle Theatre Company brings you Alan Bennett's *The Madness of George III*. The play follows the descent of a king into madness, charting the loss of his authority and his gradual transition from ruler to ruled. It questions the inherent values of a society based on order and hierarchy, subverting expectations and exposing the force of human ambition. It has moments of high comedy and farce, combined with drama of the greatest poignancy. Despite being rooted firmly in historical fact, a truly period drama, Bennett has masterfully aligned the play with our modern preoccupations and sensibilities concerning the individual, autonomy and authority, making it relevant and touching today.

To be performed in the beautiful

and highly appropriate medieval Great Hall of Durham Castle, this production is truly a theatrical rollercoaster. Intelligent and informative, it is also an entertaining and emotive drama. The play rewards both those who want to be amused and touched, and those with historical knowledge and interest. With a cast of some of the best-known actors in Durham, combined with lots of new faces and an experienced production team, the show promises to maintain the high standard set by Castle Theatre Company in the past with such 'D'Oscar' winning productions as *The Dreaming* and *Amadeus*. Get out of the Assembly Rooms and come to see *The Madness of George III* for a unique and enjoyable night of high quality Durham theatre.

Tickets £6/£5(DST/Castle Ents)  
Enquiries and bookings through  
p.j.bexon@durham.ac.uk

**The Madness of George III will be performed on the 16th-18th November in the Great Hall, in Durham Castle, by Castle Theatre Company. Previewed by Alexandra Carey.**



**Rumpelstiltskin will be performed on the 16th-18th October in Aidan's College, by Aidan's College Theatre. Previewed by Alex Eccles.**

Oo-arrgh m' hearties! Prepare yourselves for a pirate invasion in Durham as DULOG presents their production of *Pirates of Penzance*. November 8th-11th will see the Assembly Rooms transformed with a buccaneering blend of *Pirates of the Caribbean* and Gilbert & Sullivan fun.

Those of you who saw DULOG's summer show, *How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying* will have witnessed the 'Pirate Dance' so ludicrously scripted in the office-set musical. Here, however, every eyepatch and cutlass is expected and I guarantee you will not be disappointed.

*Pirates of Penzance - The Slave of Duty* tells the story of Frederic, whose nursemaid sent him to become a pirate apprentice having misinterpreted his father's wishes for his son's career as a pilot. And aren't we glad she did so, for the hilarious show that ensues is full to

Following a break from pantomime last year for *A dREAM pLAY*, Aidan's College Theatre (ACT) are returning to the panto scene this December with the classic Grimm fairy tale *Rumpelstiltskin*. As this is our first show of the year we're pulling out all the stops to make it a theatrical experience not to be missed, with the cream of Aidan's theatrical talent presenting an all-original script by Aidan's students. Come along and boo the baddy, cheer the heroine, and wonder what on earth would persuade a grown man to put on a dress and false boobs.

The best panto in Durham? Oh, yes it is!



the brim with swashbuckling entertainment?! From misheard instructions to mistaken identities and mismatched loves, this musical promises an evening of singing, dancing, acting and music from some of Durham's finest talent and all in the oh-so-irresistible style of our favourite Mr Depp and Ms Knightley. Miss out and you'll want to walk the plank.

**Pirates of Penzance will be performed on the 8th-11th November in the Assembly Rooms, by DULOG.**

Previewed by Kirsty McIntyre.

michaelmas term 2006



# WHAT'S ON

November/December 2006



**This is our Youth**  
2nd-4th November  
Assembly Rooms  
7.30pm  
£4.50/£3.50 - DST



**Hysteria**  
23rd-25th November  
Assembly Rooms  
7.30pm  
£4.50/£3.50 - DST



**Pirates of Penzance**  
8th-11th November  
Assembly Rooms  
7.30pm  
Tickets £4 - £6



**Absent Friends**  
24th-26th November  
Fountains Hall, Grey  
7.30pm  
£3.50/£3 - DST/Grey



**The Madness of George III**  
15th-18th November  
Castle Great Hall  
7.30pm; Sat Matinee  
£6 ; £5 - DST/C. Ents



**Wayward Saints**  
29th Nov - 2nd Dec  
Assembly Rooms  
7.30pm  
Tickets £4 - £5.50



**YERMA FRESHERS'PLAY**  
16th-18th November  
Assembly Rooms  
7.30pm  
£4.50/£4 - DST



**Road**  
29th Nov; 1st and 2nd December  
Caedmon Hall, Hild Bede



**The Rivals**  
16th-18th November  
Leech Hall, St. John's  
7.30pm; Sat Matinee  
£4.50/£4 - DST



**thespace between**  
6-9th December  
Assembly Rooms  
7.30pm  
£4/£3.50 - DST

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